



## THE FRIEDRICH-EBERT-STIFTUNG IN THE REGION



LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

**Promoting Social Democracy Through Dialogue**

A person wearing a blue shirt and a hat is seen from behind, working in a field. There are several large orange containers or bins in the background. The scene is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor setting.

*“Development policy  
is the peace policy of  
the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”*

This quote from Willy Brandt forms the leitmotif for our work.

## Vision and remit

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung’s International Development Cooperation Department fosters sustainable development and democracy in **Latin America, Asia, Africa** and the **Middle East**. In conjunction with its partners, important players active in the social policy field in more than 100 countries, it helps to guide future developments by:

- consolidating democratic structures, involving all social groups as much as possible,
- promoting reform processes and mechanisms to manage conflicting interests peacefully and
- working with partners to devise global strategies for the future.

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) was founded in 1925 and is the oldest political foundation in Germany. It is a private, non-profit organisation and subscribes to the ideas of Social Democracy. The foundation takes its name from the first democratically elected German President, Friedrich Ebert, and picks up on his legacy of giving political expression to freedom, solidarity and social justice. The foundation fulfils this mandate in Germany and abroad through its programmes for political education and international cooperation, accompanied by support for studies and research.

## Latin America and the Caribbean

Europe and Latin America could forge a significant strategic partnership: they have strong political and cultural affinities. After decades of unrest, Latin America has returned to relative political stability, on the whole with democratic structures. Nevertheless scant political attention is currently paid to the region in Germany. There is a risk of neglecting both the potential and the problems currently confronting Latin America, such as the enormous gap between rich and poor or growing levels of violent crime.



### THE TWO KEY GOALS OF THE FES ARE:

#### ■ Overcoming democratic deficits

The re-democratisation of Latin America, underway since the early 1980s, awoke great expectations. However, 25 years on, frustration has begun to well up, as there has been no tangible improvement in the living conditions of vast swathes of the population: in 2008 only 57% of Latin Americans considered democracy to be the best form of government. In certain Latin American states, government shortcomings in ensuring social justice, law and order in the public realm and the rule of law has given rise to discontent with the political system, which provides a fertile breeding ground for populism and authoritarianism.



The example of the indigenous population, whose growing demands for participation have to a large extent shifted to the extra-parliamentary realm and grown more radical, is a case in point, revealing the lack of effective structures to aggregate and represent particular interests. In order to mitigate the impact of developments that undermine democracy in Latin America, the FES helps to consolidate democratic institutions and supports forces on the centre-left of the political spectrum as they develop strategies and policies on burning issues such as equitable allocation of resources and sustainable development pathways.



## ■ Establishing a partnership with Latin America

The repeated call from Europe-Latin America summit meetings for a multi-lateral world order is only one indicator of the potential for a strategic partnership between Europe and Latin America. Taking shared values as the basis for debate, there is scope to engage in constructive discussions on topics such as ensuring that world trade and financial markets function equitably, and on global endeavours to combat climate change. The key player is Brazil, which utilizes its influence as the leading regional power to mediate in conflicts and plays an important role in the international arena as an advocate of a democratic world order. Other countries in the region however are also participating actively in solving global problems. The FES advises its partners on fine-tuning their profile in the international context and fosters dialogue with Germany and the EU.



## THREE STRATEGIC ROLES FOR THE FES DIALOGUE FORUM – POLITICAL ANALYSIS – POLICY ADVICE

In its work the FES concentrates on:

- intensive cooperation with parties and trade unions, parliaments, state and government institutions, non-governmental organisations, research institutes and independent media;
- continuity and long-term involvement on the spot;
- regional and international networks with scope to shape policy that extends far beyond the local and national context;
- striving to secure political and social participation for all, promoting equal treatment for both genders and for disadvantaged groups, as well as fostering intergenerational equity, and combating all forms of discrimination.

## FES PRIORITIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

### ■ Promoting democracy: reinforcing democratic processes and institutions

Democratic societies can only develop if there are institutions based on the rule of law. Formally speaking, this type of infrastructure does exist in Latin America. All too often however these institutions face obstacles due to corruption and nepotism, and may also be too remote from citizens' concerns. Strengthening and consolidating institutions based on the rule of law is a central component in FES activities. Cooperation with political parties plays an important role in this respect: democracy is not possible unless political parties can function properly. In addition the FES provides support to civil society groups. It acts to ensure respect for human rights and calls for participatory approaches in politics.

### ■ Creating social justice: strengthening trade unions

Trade unions in Latin America and the Caribbean face the difficult challenge of consolidating their position as a significant force in society and addressing the impact of globalisation competently. They can only act to represent the interests of all employees if they manage to stave off the increasing erosion of social achievements and to champion the concerns of people working in the informal labour market too. The aim is to strengthen trade unions' knowledge base and organisational capacity to allow them to participate constructively in national, regional and global decision-making processes. The FES supports trade unions in this undertaking through its country offices and its Regional Trade Union Project based in Montevideo/Uruguay ([www.fes-sindical.org](http://www.fes-sindical.org)).

### CASE STUDY: POLICY ADVICE

2008 saw the founding of the Latin American regional organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation: the Confederación Sindical de los Trabajadores/as de las Américas (CSA). The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung's regional trade union project, based in Uruguay, supported the CSA in developing its programmes. Central issues in this process were regional integration and a new "Agenda for Trade Union Renewal" to tackle the highly fragmented organisational structures of trade unions in many countries.

## ■ **Shaping a sustainable economy: in search of alternative development pathways**



In the wake of the global economic and financial crisis, there have been calls around the world for a Green New Deal as a sustainable foundation for tomorrow's economy. The search for alternative development pathways that move beyond neo-liberalism began back at the start of the millennium in Latin America, which has already grappled with numerous crises. In many countries progressive governments have been elected and have formulated their own distinctive responses to the economic, ecological, political and social challenges of today's world. The focus in this process has been on redefining the relationship between the market and state, and between growth and ecology, linked to the question of a more equitable allocation of resources. The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung continues to support the debate on new, sustainable approaches to the economy and development through a regional competence centre and a regional forum on energy and climate policy.

## ■ **Strengthening diversity: the regional media and communication project**

Independent media, along with new information and communication technologies, play a decisive part in democratisation. People need access to knowledge if they are to participate, take decisions and shape their societies. Latin America's media landscape can boast cutting-edge technology. However, as this is concentrated in the hands of just a few companies, their economic and political interests define which topics and opinions are addressed, as well as determining access to the media. Most of the population is excluded from such information channels.

The FES regional advisory project on media and communication ([www.c3fes.net](http://www.c3fes.net)), based in Bogotá, aims to foster a political and legal environment conducive to democratic structures in the media, seeks to improve regulatory mechanisms and self-regulation by the media, and supports critical utilisation of the media by civil society.

## CASE STUDY: POLITICAL ANALYSIS

The FES journal “Nueva Sociedad”, a discussion platform bringing together the worlds of politics and academia, has existed for over 30 years. Well-known Latin American authors analyse problems of regional and global significance in this publication. This unique forum for dialogue and reflection is bolstered by international conferences and the web portal [www.nuso.org](http://www.nuso.org).



### ■ Securing peace: security network

Peace and security determine the international community’s agenda and shape the lives of people around the world. In Latin America the regional conflict scenario has changed dramatically over the last few years: in addition to tensions between states, the security policy agenda is dominated by internal conflicts, for example clashes between drug cartels and the police/military impinge on public security. Impunity and corruption undermine democratic institutions. It is essential to assert the state’s monopoly on the use of force, but also to adopt preventive measures, for example through social policies. The FES Regional Security Project, which is based in Bogotá ([www.seguridadregional-fes.org](http://www.seguridadregional-fes.org)), analyses the new geopolitics and the impact of organised crime on governability in democratic societies, as well as creating networks and room for dialogue in order to make security policy more democratic.

## CASE STUDY: DIALOGUE PLATFORM

### Observatory on Organised Crime in Latin America and the Caribbean

The Observatory, a platform for dialogue on combating organised crime, aims to develop analyses, policy options and alternatives, peaceful strategies to tackle the constantly changing phenomenon of organised crime in order to counteract the collapse of democratic structures in individual states and in the region.

### ■ Strengthening regional integration



Although attempts to organise regional cooperation and economic integration in Latin America and the Caribbean began back in the 1960s, progress to date has been limited. Efforts to move ahead in developing existing regional pro-integration alliances have been stalled for years. At the same time, however, new, innovative integration mechanisms are gaining ground in the region. UNASUR – the Union of South American Nations – has set ambitious goals: it seeks to improve coordination in the region on political, economic and social issues. Another recent development is the establishment of the South American Defence Council, intended to strengthen security policy cooperation in this new alliance. The development of joint financing mechanisms by the Bank of the South (Banco del Sur) is also on the agenda.

Regional structures must assume a more democratic form in order to strengthen Latin America as a region. The FES supports ideas and measures that contribute to advancing political and institutional integration and fostering constructive involvement by trade unions, local authorities, associations and other civil society organisations.



## FES OFFICES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is represented through 18 offices in the following locations in the region: Mexico, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Bolivia, Ecuador, Columbia, Peru, Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Uruguay and Argentina. Parallel to this, the FES also organises various activities in Cuba, Haiti and Paraguay under the aegis of offices in neighbouring countries.

14 seconded staff and over 100 local experts and administrative staff work in the project offices. A 14-member team from the Latin America and the Caribbean Unit in Berlin supports them, oversees project work and engages in dialogue with partners in Germany.

*Photographs: dpa, FES, Map Pellens Bonn*

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